

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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SUBJ: NEW GOVERNOR OF ANTIOQUIA TO INITIATE URGENT ANTI DRUG

TRAFFICKING CAMPAIGN IN BANANA ZONE OF URABA

1. THE CONSUL RECEIVED A TELEPHONE REQUEST AUG 20 FROM THE NEW GOVERNOR OF ANTIOQUIA, JAIME R ECHAVARRIA INVITING HIM TO AN URGENT MEETING IN HIS OFFICE THE SAME DAY. THE MTG WAS CHAIRED BY THE GOVERNOR AND WAS ATTENDED BY OUTGOING SECY OF GOVT JOHN GOMEZ COMDR OF THE NATIONAL POLICE IN ANTIOQUIA COL ALFONSO BARRAGAN; CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE 4TH BRIGADE COL FRANCISCO RINCON MARQUEZ; THE MANAGER OF THE INDEPENDENT BANANA EXPORTING COMPANY IN URABA, DR RODRIGO JIMENEZ PINILLOS; AND THE CONSUL.

2. THE MTG HAD BEEN REQUESTED BY THE GOVERNOR IN RESPONSE TO A PLEA FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THE BANANA EXPORTING FIRM UNIBAN HEADED BY JIMENEZ. JIMENEZ STATED THAT THE PROBLEM OF DRUG TRAFFICKING ESPECIALLY OF COCAINE FROM THE URABA BANANA GROWING AREA HAS INCREASED DRASTICALLY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. QUANTITIES OF DRUGS ARE BEING HIDDEN ON SHIPS CARRYING BANANA EXPORTS TO THE US. HE NOTED THAT THE BANANA BOAT "FRIGORA", OWNED BY UNIBAN'S US BUYER, HAD RECENTLY BEEN SEARCHED BY DEA IN

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MIAMI AND THAT 38 PACKAGES OF COCAINE WORTH US\$11 MILLION HAD

BEEN DISCOVERED. THE "FRIGORA" WAS DETAINED FOR 12 DAYS AND ITS UNAVAILABILITY FOR EXPORTING BANANAS DURING THAT PERIOD CAUSED SERIOUS LOSSES TO UNIBAN AND THE INDEPENDENT URABA BANANA PRODUCERS.

3. UNIBAN IS CONCERNED THAT IF ADDITIONAL DRUG FINDS ARE MADE ON THE BANANA BOATS THERE WILL BE FURTHER AND MORE SERIOUS LOSSES THROUGH SPOILAGE AS THE BANANA SHIPS ARE HELD BY US AUTHORITIES. EVEN MORE FRIGHTENING TO UNIBAN IS THE PROSPECT THAT THE US AUTHORITIES MIGHT RETALIATE AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING BY PROHIBITING ENTRY INTO US PORTS OF SHIPS WITH A HISTORY OF CARRYING DRUGS.

4. JIMENEZ DESCRIBED THE CURRENT DRUG TRAFFIC PROBLEM IN URABA AS TOTALLY UNCONTROLLED. HIS COMPANY HAS MADE EFFORTS TO GUARD THE BANANA BOATS WITH COMPANY PERSONNEL, BUT THEY ARE QUICKLY DEMORALIZED BY THE THREATS RECEIVED FROM THE "DRUG MAFIA." HE CALLED ON THE GOVERNOR FOR URGENT ACTION TO ATTACK THE DRUG PROBLEM.

5. THERE WAS UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT AMONG THE COLOMBIANS AT THE MEETING THAT THE DRUG SITUATION IN THE ZONE IS GRAVE AND VIRTUALLY OUT OF CONTROL. COL BARRAGAN ADMITTED THAT HIS POLICE HAD ACCOMPLISHED LITTLE AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS ALL BUT IMPLIED THAT THE POLICE THERE ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM. BARRAGAN SAID POLICE UNITS ARE INADEQUATE IN NUMBER AND TOTALLY LACKING IN EQUIPMENT AND MOBILITY (LAUNCHES AND CARS).

6. THE GOVERNOR SAID HE WANTS TO TAKE QUICK ACTION TO ALLEVIATE THE SITUATION. HE SAID THAT THE DETAINING OR IMPOUNDMENT OF BANANA SHIPS IN US PORTS BECAUSE OF THE DRUG PROBLEM COULD CAUSE DISASTER TO THE PRECARIOUS URABA ECONOMY. HE TOLD THE CONSUL THAT HE WANTS TO BE SURE THAT THE US AUTHORITIES ARE AWARE THAT HE INTENDS TO TAKE FIRM AND RAPID MEASURES. AFTER FURTHER DISCUSSION, THE GOVERNOR DECIDED (A) THAT THE DEPT OF ANTIOQUIA GOVT AND THE BANANA COMPANIES AND OTHER INDUSTRIES IN THE URABA ZONE SHOULD REACH IMMEDIATE AGREEMENT ON DONATING OR LENDING A TOTAL OF 2 AUTOS AND 2 SMALL LAUNCHES TO POLICE UNITS IN URABA; (B) THAT COL BARRAGAN REQUEST A RANKING AND QUALIFIED POLICE OFFICIAL FROM NATIONAL POLICE HQS TO HEAD AN INVESTIGATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF THE DRUG TRAFFIC PROBLEM IN URABA.

7. HE ASKED THE CONSUL IF USG ASSISTANCE IN AN ANTI DRUG TRAFFICKING PROGRAM IN URABA WOULD BE POSSIBLE. THE CONSUL EXPLAINED TO THE NEW GOVERNOR THE ACTIVE PROGRAM BEING PURSUED BY THE USG WORKING WITH GOC NATIONAL AUTHORITIES. THE CONSUL SAID HE WOULD BE PLEASED TO ASK THE EMB WHETHER IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR A NARCOTICS EXPERT FROM THE EMB TO COME TO MEDELLIN TO REVIEW

THE PROBLEM WITH WHOMEVER THE GOVERNOR DESIGNATED. THE CONSUL ALSO TOLD THE GOVERNOR THAT HE WOULD INFORM THE EMB AND WASHINGTON OF THE GOVERNOR'S CONCERN OVER THE DRUG TRAFFICKING PROBLEM AND HIS DETERMINATION TO TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION.

8. THE GOVERNOR HAS SCHEDULED ANOTHER MTG OF THE SAME PARTICIPANTS FOR AUG 28. THE CONSUL WILL CONSULT BY TELEPHONE WITH THE EMBASSY.
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